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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 THE HAGUE 002154

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#) [NL](#)

SUBJECT: DUTCH PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON IRAQ

REF: THE HAGUE 2055

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY.

1. (U) Summary: On August 24, the Dutch parliament interrupted its August recess for a special session on Iraq attended by Defense Minister Kamp and Foreign Minister Bot. The parliament endorsed the additional security measures taken in the wake of the August 14 ambush of Dutch troops in Iraq and reiterated its support for the Dutch military mission in Iraq. Several members, however, noted that withdrawal of Dutch forces should be an option if the security situation deteriorates to the point that Dutch troops cannot operate effectively. Bot provided a detailed overview of planned EU presidency initiatives regarding Iraq (including sending an EU exploratory mission to Iraq, inviting Prime Minister Allawi to the European Council in November, and holding an EU Troika ministerial with Iraq on the margins of the UNGA in September). Bot stressed that the level of cooperation and coordination with the U.S. in Iraq remained good. In recent public statements -- prompted by increasing Dutch concerns about the Iraq mission -- Kamp has stressed that the Dutch currently have no plans to extend the mission beyond its current mandate, which ends in March 2005. End Summary.

Tightened security measures

2. (U) As noted reftel, one Dutch serviceman was killed and five were wounded when a Dutch patrol was ambushed in Iraq on August 14. Following this incident, Dutch patrols in Iraq were reduced significantly and made more secure. On August 19, Kamp announced supplemental measures: the troops will be supplied with more armored vehicles and four-wheel drives equipped with machine guns; two infantry platoons of about 60 persons are being sent to Iraq to reinforce security; and the intelligence-gathering capabilities of the Dutch troops will be expanded.

Parliament approves

3. (U) On August 24, the parliament interrupted its summer recess for an extraordinary session attended by Kamp and Foreign Minister Bot. During the session (attended by POL FSN) all parties expressed support for the supplemental security measures noted above. The major political parties that endorsed the cabinet decision in June to extend Dutch participation in the multinational force in Iraq until March 2005 also took the opportunity to reiterate their support for the mission, with only the conservative Liberal (VVD) party expressing support for continuing the mission until December 2005. Several party representatives stated for the record that an earlier withdrawal should be considered a possibility if the security situation deteriorated to the point where Dutch troops could no longer adequately do what they were sent to Iraq to do. The majority agreed with Kamp's assertion, however, that Dutch troops are able to function effectively under current conditions. (Note: As is usual in parliamentary sessions called to ask questions of ministers, no votes were taken. End Note.)

Kamp: Challenges Increasing, but Mission Still Relevant

4. (U) In response to questions from members, Kamp conceded that the ability of Dutch troops to gather accurate intelligence had decreased with the turnover of sovereignty (along with primary responsibility for security) to Iraqi authorities. Kamp stressed that the key to protecting Dutch troops was maintaining positive relations with the local population. Although the majority of Iraqis remain "well-disposed" towards the Dutch, he said, attitudes were changing. Foreign troops are often held responsible for the lack of economic development in their areas, for example. The developments in Najaf have also been manipulated to turn many Iraqis against any foreign presence. Despite worsening relations with the local population Kamp said that morale among the Dutch troops remains high. Dutch troops will continue to look for opportunities to convey to the population that their mission is to help promote stability and security and to offer the Iraqis the prospect of a better life. They are not there to occupy the country, he

stressed, but to help reestablish Iraqi authority so that they can leave as soon as possible. Kamp noted that the situation in Al Muthanna was much better than elsewhere in Iraq.

Bot: EU Active; US Keeping Dutch Well-Informed

15. (U) Foreign Minister Bot provided a detailed overview of the political situation in Iraq for the parliamentarians. In this context he mentioned that there are indications that "supplies" are being moved from Iran to Iraq, but declined to elaborate on Iran's possible role, saying merely that he could not confirm what exactly Iran may be involved in. Bot also briefly reviewed EU initiatives that the Dutch, as EU president, were actively pursuing. These included sending an exploratory mission to Iraq to assess possible areas of increased EU involvement, inviting Iraqi Prime Minister Allawi to address the European Council meeting in November, and holding an EU Troika meeting with the Iraqis on the margins of the UNGA in New York in September.

16. (U) Asked if the Netherlands is kept fully informed by the U.S. about all the developments relating to Iraq, Bot unhesitatingly confirmed that this was the case. The Netherlands is informed and consulted every day, he said, through a range of fora, including regular consultations among troop-supplying countries in Baghdad, with the USG in Washington and at CENTCOM, through diplomatic channels and conference calls.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: The August 24 parliamentary debate underscored both the Dutch government's commitment to continuing its mission in Iraq, and the broad level of political support the mission enjoys. At the same time, press coverage of Iraq has been relatively critical in the wake of the August 14 attack. Several recent opinion pieces have questioned whether Dutch troops should remain in Iraq in the face of apparently increasing Iraqi hostility; some newspapers have also published emotional letters from the family members of Dutch servicemen serving there.

18. (SBU) While there is clear majority support for completing the current Dutch mission in Iraq, there is much less support for an additional extension (beyond March 2005) under current circumstances. Kamp himself, although a member of the only political party (VVD) calling for a longer mission, told a Dutch newspaper on August 24 that Dutch troops would leave at the end of their current mission because "the Iraqis will then be able to take over; if not, we should be replaced." According to press reports, Kamp also reportedly told a visiting Japanese parliamentary delegation on August 26 that a decision to extend would be "extremely unlikely."
END COMMENT.

MINIMIZED CONSIDERED

Russel